



News Release

Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department

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Health Care Volunteers To Receive Smallpox Vaccinations

CHATTANOOGA -- This week, for the first time in 30 years, Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department and the Southeast Region of the Tennessee Department of Health will be giving smallpox vaccinations. On Friday and Monday, more than 60 public health nurses and physicians will be immunized during a special two-day endeavor.

The pre-event smallpox vaccination clinic will be located in the main building of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department, and operated jointly by the Chattanooga-Hamilton County and the Southeast Region health departments. The Southeast Region includes Bledsoe, Bradley, Franklin, Grundy, McMinn, Marion, Meigs, Polk, Rhea and Sequatchie Counties.

The public health workers will be immunized at this time so they can serve as vaccinators during a phase one pre-event clinic that will start Feb. 10, and will be completed within 30 days. During that clinic, some 800 hospital employees from both regions who have volunteered to serve on their hospitals' smallpox response teams are scheduled to begin getting inoculations.

Volunteers from the hospitals represent the wide variety of workers whose help would be needed should a case of smallpox occur: doctors and nurses, laundry workers and maintenance crews, technicians and therapists. Given the disease's often deadly effect on its victims, immediate care would be essential.

Most Tennessee hospitals have agreed to participate in the Tennessee Department of Health's smallpox preparedness efforts.

"Although smallpox vaccine contains vaccinia virus and cannot cause smallpox, the vaccine does carry some risk," said Becky Barnes, administrator of the Chattanooga-Hamilton

County Health Department. "However, every possible safeguard will be taken to eliminate or reduce possible risk to those receiving the vaccine and to the people with whom they come in contact."

For most people immunized against smallpox, the vaccine causes only minor illnesses such as aches and pains, rash, fever, and a sore arm. But since the vaccine contains live vaccinia virus which can be spread to other parts of the body, it can cause serious side effects such as eye infections, blindness and severe skin conditions.

In rare cases, the vaccine causes serious neurological problems such as swelling of the brain. And in about one case out of a million, it can cause death.

"All potential vaccinees are being screened to make sure there are no medical reasons why they should not be vaccinated," Ms. Barnes said. Those with histories of medical conditions identified by the Centers of Disease Control as likely to cause serious side effects from the vaccine will not be vaccinated. Further, people who live with someone who has these conditions will not receive the vaccine.

These conditions include:

- skin conditions such as eczema or atopic dermatitis
- a weakened immune system caused by:
 - treatment for cancer
 - organ transplant medications
 - HIV-positive status
 - some autoimmune diseases

Women who are pregnant as well as people living in the household with a pregnant woman will not be vaccinated. Also, breastfeeding women will not receive the vaccine.

Healthcare workers who have been screened and then inoculated will take special precautions to prevent possible spread of vaccinia virus to other persons. The vaccination site will be covered with a bandage. The bandage will be checked daily, when the individual reports for work, to make certain it is secure and does not leak. It will be changed every three or four days, and sooner if it shows signs of possible leakage.

Everyone vaccinated will be told who to contact in case they have an adverse reaction, or want to ask questions about the vaccination process.

“We have put a lot of planning into this effort,” said Hamilton County Executive Claude Ramsey. “I’m confident that we are doing all we can to protect our residents.”

“The vaccinations being given now to health care workers here and around the nation will greatly enhance efforts to respond to a bioterrorist attack, should one occur,” said Dr. Jan BeVille, Health Officer for the Southeast Region.

“If smallpox were to be reintroduced into the world by terrorists, vaccinated public health employees could immediately be assigned to evaluate suspected cases, vaccinate exposed persons to prevent them from getting the disease, and handle quarantine and other epidemiological functions.”

"The last case of smallpox was in 1977," said Dr. Valerie Boaz, Health Officer for the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department. "These public health efforts are aimed to keep it that way."